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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000349

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SUBJECT: AFGHAN AMBASSADOR PLEADS FOR GREATER TURKISH INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: ANKARA 304

Classified By: DCM Doug Silliman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Afghan Ambassador in Ankara believes that Turkey, as a Muslim country, can provide more effective and acceptable support to Afghanistan than other NATO allies. Military and police training, education, construction, and religious messaging are Turkey's comparative strengths. He argues that the US and Afghanistan must work together to expand Turkey's contributions in these areas. END SUMMARY.

AFGHANS LIKE TURKS

¶2. (C) Afghan Ambassador to Turkey Masoud Khalili, in an impassioned two-hour monologue to DCM March 2, argued that the US and Afghanistan must convince Turkey to play a more active role in Afghanistan. Average Afghans -- those who must fight against Taliban domination -- have a positive, if somewhat misguided, impression of Turks as "good Sunni Muslims." This means that Turkish assistance and a Turkish presence in sensitive areas of Afghanistan is less controversial than other NATO members or perceived "Christian countries" like the US, UK and Canada. (Note: The impression that Turkey's advice goes down easier in Afghanistan is shared by the Turks themselves; they offered to put what they termed their "soft power" at the disposal of allies as we work to shape events in Afghanistan (ref). End note.)

THE PLAN

¶3. (C) Khalili laid out six areas where Turkey could should expand its assistance.

-- ARMY AND POLICE TRAINING: As a "Muslim army" with a history of helping to build the first Afghan army in the 1930s, Turks should play a more prominent role in training the Afghan National Army (ANA). He recommended joint US and Turkish training of ANA units so that Afghan soldiers can learn from "both John and Mustafa." While there has been less extensive Turkish-Afghan police contact, Turkey can provide training in both counter narcotics and criminal investigations. (Note: Turkey's efforts in this area have been significant: Turkish military training, both in Afghanistan and in Turkey, has been a high point of Turkey's

engagement. Turkish training of police has also been important, but only 150 Afghan police officers have been involved in counter-narcotics training with Turkish counterparts. Turkey could do more in these areas. End note.)

-- CONSTRUCTION: Turkish firms, using international financing/donations, should build housing blocks for military and police officers and government officials (like those that exist in Turkey). Having "an apartment with two bedrooms" would give an Afghan soldier "something more concrete to fight for." Giving Turkish firms the contracts for building the compounds provides extra incentives for Turkish government involvement in other areas. (Note: Turkish commitments to build housing have been its greatest success. Turkey's June 2008 pledge in Paris brought its contribution to USD 200 million, most of which will be in the form of housing construction across Afghanistan, managed by Turkey's state housing authority. Turkish officials point out that Turkey gets more effect than other Western donors from its contributions as it expends far less on security for its contractors. End note.)

-- EDUCATION: There are currently 800 Afghan students in Turkish universities; that should increase to more than 5,000 per year. Turkey should also expand construction of primary and secondary schools (which Turkey is doing in some areas) and send more Turks as teachers. He argued that a Turkish-funded girls school in northern Afghanistan with 35 female Turkish teachers is a powerful symbol of Turkey's commitment to Afghanistan and provides at least a few Afghan

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girls with strong role models on the equality of women. He praised also the schools in Afghanistan run by the Fetullah Gulen Sufi movement. While at first skeptical of the movement's religious roots, he said that "children of relatives" who have attended the schools reported no proselytizing and high academic standards.

-- EXCHANGES: Turkey should expand its programs to bring political parties, women's groups, and students to Turkey for short periods to see "a Muslim country that has succeeded." Seeing the wealth and development of Ankara or Istanbul helps Afghans believe that they can accomplish the same at home.

-- COMBAT FORCES: Turkey should move its forces into areas where combat operations are needed. Turkish forward operating bases, he argued, would better challenge local populations to support the Afghan government by showing Muslims directly confronting the Taliban.

-- RELIGIOUS MESSAGES: The Turkish Diyanet (Religious Affairs Secretariat) should send imams to Afghanistan to preach in mosques. Turkish imams "dressed in suits and ties" and preaching Turkey's tolerant interpretation of Islam could begin to modernize Afghans' views of Islam.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

¶4. (C) Khalili said that he has raised these ideas with PM Erdogan, Chief of Defense Gen. Basbug, and MFA personnel. All were polite and receptive, but non-committal. He believes that it will take a strong push from the US at the political level to convince Turkey to take the next steps. He is working on getting higher levels of the Karzai government to deliver the same requests to Ankara.

THE DOWN SIDE

¶5. (C) Khalili argued that Afghans would have to make sure that Turkey did not "play the ethnic game" by supporting only Turkic Afghans. Recent Turkish engagement, including in Wardak province and Kabul, leads him to believe that the

Turks are willing to deal with Hazara, Tajiks, and Pashtouns as well. He also expected increased Iranian nervousness over expanded Turkish engagement in Afghanistan, accompanied by "the usual Iranian covert meddling," but thought the advantages heavily outweighed the disadvantages.

COMMENT

¶ 15. (C) We defer to Embassy Kabul and Washington on whether Turkish troops and trainers and teachers would be more effective or readily accepted than those of other NATO or coalition partners. While we admire Khalili's enthusiasm, Turkey has been reluctant so far in responding to our calls for increased commitments, particularly in expanding the role of Turkey's military forces. We concur that Turkish construction firms active in Afghanistan appear to be able to do more with less. If these ideas proposed by Khalili appear sound, they could form the base of a joint US-Afghan engagement plan to expand Turkish contributions in Afghanistan.

BIO NOTE

¶ 16. (C) Khalili is a Tajik (Farsi)-speaking supporter of the Northern Alliance and was injured in the September 9, 2001 bombing that killed Tajik Commander Ahmed Shah Masoud. Khalili arrived in Ankara as Ambassador in 2006 after nine years as Ambassador to India. He served in the mid-1990s as Ambassador to Pakistan, but claims that he was expelled after complaining to then-PM Benazir Bhutto about Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate support for the Taliban. He is the son of a Farsi poet and Afghan Ambassador and both reads and writes poetry in Farsi, with a particular fondness for the work of Jelaluddin Rumi. He is married to Suhayla, from Nooristan, and has three sons (currently aged 28, 23, and 21).

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Jeffrey